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Reports on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians, its Bureau and Teams of Specialists

Follow-up to the 2014 Conference of European Statisticians seminar on "What is the value of official statistics and how do we communicate that value?"

Note by the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom

Summary

This note provides information on the progress in follow-up to the decisions of the Conference of European Statisticians 2014 seminar on "What is the value of official statistics and how do we communicate that value?" The Bureau discussed the follow-up at its meetings in October 2014 and February 2015, and decided to establish a Task Force on the Value of Official Statistics. Work in some related areas is already ongoing under the Conference of European Statisticians, as explained further in the note.

The note is submitted to the Conference of European Statisticians for information. It was drafted in cooperation with Austria, Canada, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Eurostat, OECD and the UNECE Secretariat.

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I. Background

1. In April 2014, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) held a seminar on "What is the value of official statistics and how do we communicate that value?", and agreed on a number of follow-up actions:

(a) There is a lot of potential and interest to continue work related to the value of official statistics. There are things that the global statistical community can do together to make a paradigm shift from product to market orientation in communicating official statistics. The existing expert groups should be used for this purpose as much as possible;

(b) The UNECE High-level Group (HLG) for Modernization of Statistical Production and Services was asked to review possible actions to share best practices and develop common tools and solutions in this area;

(c) There is a need for developing a common language and terminology related to the value of official statistics and its communication;

(d) Measuring the economic value of official statistics through collection of examples and case studies would be useful.

2. In October 2014, the CES Bureau discussed follow-up to the recommended actions and agreed that a road-map should be developed to explore the key aspects to be covered in further work on communicating the value of official statistics. The Bureau members raised the following points about possible further work:

(a) The overall aim of this work would be to achieve a recognition of the value of official statistics by stakeholders;

(b) A common strategy, tools and marketing techniques for communicating the value of official statistics would be useful. These can include indicators to measure the value of official statistics, and a collection of case studies of calculating its economic value;

(c) Using an external evaluation and engaging people outside official statistics to promote its value may increase the credibility of these measures;

(d) There is a lack of comparable information on the cost of producing official statistics that could be used in the discussions on value of official statistics. Work on methods for calculating the cost of producing official statistics could be launched.

3. A group composed of the United Kingdom (chair), Austria, Canada, Mexico, OECD and UNECE prepared a concept note on the way forward which the CES Bureau discussed at its meeting in February 2015. The CES Bureau decided to establish a task force to develop ways to value the impact of official statistics, and asked the above mentioned countries and organisations to prepare terms of reference for the Task Force.

II. Why is this work needed?

4. International work on estimating and communicating the value of official statistics has become ever more important to:

- Work within budget constraints imposed on many national statistical offices;
- Clearly convey the reasons why investment in official statistics should be made;
- Defend the relevance of official statistics in the increasingly competitive information industry;

- Define in the presence of Data Revolution what is the business of Official Statistics;
- Pool together the good practices developed by statistical offices to enable learning from each other;
- Identify and develop better ways to explain official statistics to get people to understand their true value;

5. For effective communication, statisticians need to agree on;

- How to measure the value of official statistics.
- How to assess the overall impact of official statistics on the society.
- How to market/publicise official statistics and their value in a convincing manner.

6. Joint work would be helpful for advancing the measurement of the value and impact of official statistics which are difficult to define and quantify. It takes time before the impact of official statistics on the quality of government policy and the related effect on people can be observed. Work on estimating and communicating the value of official statistics should build on work already done to avoid duplication.

III. Related initiatives

A. Under the Conference of European Statisticians

7. A number of activities are carried out under the CES dealing with communicating the value of official statistics, namely:

(a) The HLG Modernisation Committee on Products and Sources has a work stream led by Richie McMahon (CSO Ireland), dealing with communicating and marketing the value of official statistics. The group updated a paper[1] originally drafted for the CES seminar on the value of official statistics in April 2014. The paper reflects on the unique values of official statistics and the weaknesses, describes some national practices, and discusses branding of official statistics. The paper also proposed a wider survey of national statistical offices to gather information about marketing the value of official statistics. An explorative survey of National Statistical Offices on outreach, communication, promotion and marketing activities was conducted in the first quarter of 2015. The survey will be followed-up by a more targeted survey where further information is collected on specific projects/activities. This will be coordinated between the HLG Modernisation Committee and the Work Session on Communication of Statistics. These surveys will be helpful in gathering good practices in communicating and marketing the value of official statistics. The goal is to establish an inventory of current and planned projects to foster exchange of experience;

(b) The regular Work Sessions on Communication of Statistics, currently chaired by Michael Levi (US Bureau of Labor Statistics), bring together communication experts to share ideas and experience. An expert meeting to be held in Washington, in April 2015, will discuss for one day the topic of "Building and Maintaining the Credibility of Official Statistics" to demonstrate the value of statistics to respondents. The same expert group has

[1] www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.45/2014/papers/Corien_Brouwer.pdf

discussed other topics related to communicating the value of official statistics, such as improving statistical literacy and building credibility[2];

(c) A new cross-cutting Task-Team on Communicating Statistical Modernisation was created in the context of the UNECE HLG for the Modernisation of Statistical Production and Services, and started work in February 2015. This group focuses solely on improving the communication of modernisation initiatives within statistical organisations and the official statistical community. This Task-Team might provide a useful "sounding board" for any new initiatives relating to communication;

(d) Some countries are using the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) as a tool to estimate the cost of official statistics. The current leaders in this respect include Estonia and Ireland. One advantage of this approach is increased international comparability of cost break-downs. An extension to the GSBPM to cover the non-data activities of statistical organisations is also being developed. These non-data activities should also be included when estimating the costs of official statistics. The new Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organisations[3] (GAMSO) will help in this respect.

B. Other related experience among the group members[4]

8. Countries have developed good practices in communicating the value of official statistics. International organizations have also worked in this area, e.g. on estimating the costs of producing official statistics and the related response burden. Currently, there is little information on countries' experience and how effective their initiatives have been.

9. The OECD Value for Money project tried to make a systematic assessment of the organization's costs (or inputs) and (the impact of) its outputs. To measure the output and its impact in monetary terms proved to be very complicated, if not impossible. In the end, it was decided to develop a systematic list of indicators based on directly observable measures for the output of the OECD, and to gather and further develop case studies quantifying the economic effect of OECD outputs.

10. Austria communicates the value of official statistics to the media with concrete examples relating to its outputs. For example, Statistics Austria introduced a register-based methodology for the population and housing census. As a result, this census round was much less costly than the previous one. The cost savings were communicated to the media with a very good response. Another example that was promoted to the media was the personal inflation calculator, launched some weeks ago. It was so popular among users that the server got overloaded. Austria is monitoring some indicators to assess the value of their products, but does not invest in mass media campaigns.

11. Canada communicates the value of official statistics to its citizens by ensuring its data holdings are broadly used, known and cited by influencers. This is done through regular client consultations; the national Statistical Information Service; the Official Release program; engagement with academia and researchers through the Research Data Centres Network; the popular StatCan website (25 million visits annually) with its Open Data portal and information of appeal to targeted audiences; comprehensive Media Relations services which results in 6,000 citations a year in mainstream media; outreach to businesses and community organizations; the well-attended *Talking Stats* event series

[2] Materials of the relevant sessions are available at: for 2012: www.unece.org/index.php?id=28542#/ and for 2008: www.unece.org/index.php?id=14436#/

[3] www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/GAMSO

[4] See the group of countries and organisations in paragraph 3 of this paper.

where the Chief Statistician – joined by panels of experts – discuss statistical findings on different themes with the public; and a strong presence in social media with the StatCan Blog, the Blog for researchers, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube channels. The success of the communication activities and channels is measured with a defined set of performance indicators to gage the level of reach, take-up rate, and engagement with the Canadian public.

12. Mexico uses innovative methodology to measure in monetary terms the market value of official statistical and geographical information used by the media. These data are used for an added value indicator to identify the preferences of the general public by sectors. INEGI also carries out positioning campaigns as part of their systematic and professional interaction with the media and to strengthen the society´s confidence in official statistics. Surveys to measure public trust in INEGI's statistics are conducted. INEGI applies an Open Data Policy (approved in 2014) and emphasizes the provision of information free of charge: "INEGI´s business is not to sell information, but to ensure that the information is used". Rather than promoting directly the value of official statistics, INEGI has in place mechanisms that prove the value and relevance of official statistics, for example the Quality Assurance System which is made visible to users. Use of innovative communication tools is an important part of this work, including posts in social media, call centers, account managers promoting INEGI's statistics to strategic users, services providing microdata access and state of the art web pages, upcoming video press releases, etc. Specific attention is paid to strategic users of statistics, for example, by providing tailored training programs on the use of statistics. For example, in January 2015, 280 workers of the Federal Audit Institution of Mexico were trained, and by the end of 2015, a total of 2,000 workers from the Institution will be trained.

13. In the United Kingdom, measuring the impact of official statistics is an important issue. Experience shows:

(a) The importance of knowing the full and true costs of particular statistics and blocks of statistics so as to assist prioritization and show the efficiency of the statistical system within necessarily constrained resources.

(b) The importance of knowing the benefits of particular statistics so as to better communicate the value of these statistics.

(d) The need to communicate the existence and implications of statistics so as to maximize their value to decision makers within the economy and society.

(e) The desirability of measuring the impact of official statistics so as to guide future production and dissemination methods towards an optimal outcome.

(f) The need to be able to demonstrate the benefits and impact of official statistics so as to guide the allocation of national resources towards statistics commensurate with the benefits they yield.

14. While work is going on in the United Kingdom on all of these issues, the problems to be faced are tractable but non-trivial. Agreeing on methods for cost estimation internationally would be valuable, saving the need to reinvent wheels and also enabling some level of comparability.

IV. Strands of further work

15. Existing CES activities, described in Section III A., provide an important basis for advancing the work on communicating the value of official statistics. These existing work strands should be brought together and combined with countries' remaining challenges in

order to form a road-map and priorities on the way forward in estimating and communicating the value of official statistics.

16. Further work to achieve recognition of the value of official statistics has affinity with the formulation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, developed by the CES and endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2014. The following general approach is proposed:

- Initial work to identify and agree on the key issues generally faced in the valuation of official statistics and their marketing;
- Assemble evidence of good practice in these key issues;
- Form a synthesis of the key issues faced and good practices for mutual learning and development of a common framework, bearing in mind that implementation needs to be tailored to countries' circumstances and needs.

17. The overall strategy or work programme for estimating and communicating the value of official statistics could consist of three work strands:

- Work strand 1: Improving the marketing of the value of official statistics.
- Work strand 2: Valuing the costs or inputs of producing official statistics.
- Work strand 3: Valuing the impact of official statistics. Analyzing both the inputs and outputs of official statistics would enable measuring the efficiency of compiling official statistics.

A. Work strand 1: Improving the marketing of the value of official statistics

18. So far, the focus of current CES activities in this area has been on the communication and outreach of official statistics rather than specifically on communicating the value of official statistics. The following steps would help to strengthen the focus on the value of official statistics:

(a) Establish what is going on internationally and nationally to decide what needs to be done. This would require collaboration with the HLG Modernisation Committee on Products and Sources in the planned HLG follow-up survey to collect information on ongoing activities relating especially to communicating the value of official statistics;

(b) Identify and share good practices on communicating and marketing the value of official statistics using the HLG survey. Create an inventory or a knowledge base of good practices, as planned by the Modernisation Committee;

(c) National statistical offices have communication strategies some of which include actions to promote the value of official statistics. Based on these, develop common priorities and tools for communicating the value of official statistics.

Mechanism:

19. HLG Modernization Committee on Products and Sources would be best placed to deal with the communication and marketing aspects of the value of official statistics.

20. Work Sessions on Communication of Statistics would provide a platform for sharing experience on communicating and marketing the value of official statistics.

B. Work strand 2: Valuing the costs or inputs of producing official statistics

21. It has been difficult to develop comparable measures of costs of producing official statistics. The following steps would help to assess the possibility to value the costs of producing official statistics in a more consistent and internationally comparable way:

(a) Share information on existing good practice in using GSBPM for cost estimation. Using the GSBPM and its extension, GAMSO, for estimating the costs of statistical production seems to be a promising tool for deriving more comparable cost measures;

(b) Additional countries could test the use of GSBPM and GAMSO for cost estimation based on the lessons learned in Estonia and Ireland;

(c) Draft practical advice on estimating the costs of statistical production based on the lessons learned during the testing phase.

Mechanism:

22. HLG Modernization Committee on Standards is in charge of developing GSBPM and GAMSO and would be best placed to carry this work strand forward.

C. Work strand 3: Valuing the impact of official statistics

23. Measuring whether official statistics deliver outputs that have an important impact on society would provide substantive arguments for promoting official statistics. The following steps would enable assessing the possibility to value the impact of official statistics:

(a) Establish what is going on internationally and nationally to quantify the value of official statistics and collect information on any good practices;

(b) Review examples of how other industries are measuring and communicating the value of their output;

(c) Develop a common framework to measure and understand the benefits and impact of official statistics on society;

(d) Develop indicators to measure the value of official statistics. This could include simple measures, such as number of hits on websites that provide statistical data and services; and number of citations to released statistics and statistical publications. On the other hand, more complex indicators could be developed, e.g. on policy decisions influenced by statistics and for cost-benefit analysis related to investing in official statistics. This could include assessing the possibility to put an economic value to official statistics, e.g. the monetary value of carrying out a population census;

(e) Encourage testing of the indicator framework in countries and collect and analyse the data to find evidence of the value of official statistics and any correlations between good governance and investment into official statistics;

(f) Draft a convincing narrative that can be used for better communicating the value of official statistics. Such a narrative could be discussed and endorsed by the Conference.

Mechanism:

24. Phase 1: Create a Task Force on valuing the impact of official statistics since no group is currently working on these issues. The current group led by the United Kingdom could constitute the Task Force and draft the terms of reference to cover the above steps (a) to (d) with the following activities:

- Define what is meant by the value of official statistics and what is it that the users really value in official statistics[5].
- Liaise with the other CES groups to ensure cohesion, avoid duplication and generate a stronger focus on the value of official statistics in the related activities.
- Review the current practices, measurement frameworks and indicators that may exist in statistical offices for the purposes of valuing their impact.
- Collect examples of how other industries are measuring and communicating the value of their output.
- Assess the feasibility of developing a framework with a set of indicators that could be implemented by countries for valuing the impact of official statistics.

25. The Task Force would provide their first findings later in 2015.

26. Phase 2: Based on the outcome of the Task Force work, carry out a pilot testing of the possible framework and a set of indicators in countries. Collect and analyse the information and develop a convincing narrative showcasing the value of official statistics.

V. Decision by the CES Bureau

27. The Bureau strongly supported the proposal, including the following work strands:

(a) Valuing the impact of official statistics (work strand 3), to be led by a new Task Force. This area requires intensive effort to establish a framework and indicators for measuring the value of official statistics. The Task Force should also coordinate all CES activities related to the value of official statistics;

(b) Improving the marketing of the value of official statistics (work strand 1) to be led by the HLG Modernization Committee on Products and Sources in line with their current work plans. The Work Sessions on Communication of Statistics provide a platform for exchanging experience in this area;

(c) Valuing the costs of producing official statistics (work strand 2) to be led by the HLG Modernization Committee on Standards, especially to share current experience and practices in using CES standards as a basis for cost estimation.

28. The Bureau decided to establish a Task Force on the value of official statistics and asked the group of countries and organizations, led by the United Kingdom, to prepare the terms of reference (see the proposed draft terms of reference in Annex I).

29. The following countries and international organisations have expressed interest in participating in the Task Force: the United Kingdom (chair), Austria, Canada, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Eurostat and OECD. Additional countries and organisations interested in participating are asked to contact UNECE Secretariat: anu.peltola@unece.org

[5] Building value should be based on responding to users' preferences including continuous improvement of technology use, innovation, user orientation, real time information, free access, problem solving, simplicity, certified quality, security, confidentiality, strategic partnerships etc.

Annex I

Draft terms of reference of the Task Force on the Value of Official Statistics[6]

I. Background

1. The issue of valuing the impact of official statistics is closely linked to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics that provide unique criteria to ensure the production of objective and reliable information for everyone. Regardless of the central role of official statistics in informing decision makers and society at large, stakeholders sometimes fail to see the value of official statistics. Currently, tight budget constraints are imposed on many national statistical offices, despite the growing demand for statistics globally and challenges arising from the increasingly competitive information industry.

2. Under these conditions, the need for international work to define and measure the value of official statistics and its impact on decision making has become ever more important to enable:

- Defining, in the midst of Data Revolution, what is the business of official statistics.
- Conveying the reasons why investment in official statistics should be made.
- Pooling together good practices of statistical offices to support learning.
- Identifying and developing better ways to explain the value of official statistics.

3. In April 2014, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) held a seminar on "What is the value of official statistics and how do we communicate that value?" The Conference stated that the value of official statistics should be promoted as a global asset, and called for cooperation and joint actions at the international level, for example to develop a common language and terminology related to the value of official statistics; and to measure the economic value of official statistics through collection of case studies.

4. In October 2014, the CES Bureau discussed follow-up to the recommended actions, and asked a group of interested countries and organizations to develop a road-map to explore the key aspects to be covered in further work on the value of official statistics. A group composed of the United Kingdom (chair), Austria, Canada, Mexico, OECD and UNECE prepared a concept note on the way forward which the CES Bureau discussed at its meeting in February 2015. The CES Bureau decided to establish a task force to develop ways to value the impact of official statistics.

II. Mandate

5. The Task Force work is conducted within the framework of CES and its Bureau. The Task Force will submit an interim report and a final report to the CES Bureau.

[6] For approval for the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians.

III. Objective

6. The objective of the Task Force will be to define the value of official statistics and develop ways for its measurement that will allow for better understanding and communication of this value to society. The Task Force will assess the feasibility of developing a framework and a set of indicators for valuing the impact of official statistics.

7. The Task Force will liaise with the related CES groups that deal with communication issues to ensure cohesion, avoid duplication and encourage a stronger focus on the value of official statistics.

IV. Planned activities and outputs

8. The Task Force will undertake its work in two phases. During the first phase the following activities will be carried out:

(a) Define what is meant by the value of official statistics:

(i) Consider what the users and stakeholders value in official statistics;

(ii) Collect cases showcasing the value of official statistics for decision making;

(iii) Consider how official statisticians can build additional value by working jointly with the private sector or other stakeholders. An in-depth review of strategic partnerships with stakeholders in the information industry, to be prepared by Canada, will feed into this work;

(b) Explore how other industries are measuring and communicating the value of their output;

(c) Review current practices, measurement frameworks and indicators that may exist in statistical offices for valuing the impact of official statistics;

(d) Develop ways to measure the value of official statistics:

(i) Identify possible indicators that could show the value of official statistics;

(ii) Develop a framework with a set of indicators, if considered feasible;

(e) Recommend actions for promoting and increasing the value of official statistics.

9. The output of this phase will be a report which defines the value of official statistics and suggests how to measure it and how to promote better understanding of this value.

10. During the second phase, the work will continue with:

(a) Pilot testing of the indicator framework in countries;

(b) Collecting and analysing data to find evidence of the value of official statistics and any correlations between good governance and investment into official statistics;

(c) Drafting a convincing narrative that can be used for better communication of the value of official statistics.

V. Timetable

11. The first activities of the Task Force for the period from early 2015 to early 2016, are planned according to the following tentative timetable:

Timing	Task
Mar-Apr 2015	Agree on the terms of reference and the work plan; Identify task leaders and launch work on tasks (a) to (c)
May-Jul 2015	Analyse the findings of the explorative HLG survey and the findings from tasks (a) to (c)
Aug-Oct 2015	Launch work to identify possible indicators and to develop a framework for valuing the impact of official statistics (d)
Nov-Dec 2015	Consider recommended actions for promoting better understanding of the value of official statistics (e)
Dec 2015	Submit an interim report to the CES Bureau
Feb 2016	Consider feedback from the CES Bureau and finalise the report
Mar 2016	Submit the interim report to the April 2016 CES plenary session for discussion

VI. Methods of work

12. The Task Force will primarily work via email and telephone conferences. Face-to-face meetings may be organized, preferably on the occasion of events attended by a significant number of Task Force members. Participation to the meetings will be self-funded.

13. The Task Force will liaise with the UNECE High-Level Group Modernisation Committee on Products and Sources that is dealing with the communication and marketing aspects of the value of official statistics and with the Modernisation Committee on Standards that is developing standard tools for statistical production that can also be used for cost estimation. The Work Sessions on the Communication of Statistics provide a possible platform for discussing issues emerging from the Task Force work.

VII. Membership

14. The following countries and international organisations have expressed interest in participating in the Task Force: the United Kingdom (chair), Austria, Canada, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Eurostat and OECD.

15. UNECE acts as Secretariat to the Task Force.